A hand came up in this week's Tuesday afternoon session underlining the importance of the intermediate spot cards when deciding how to tackle a suit. This was the hand:

Deal file from database

BOARD 25		
BD: 25	♠ KT64 ♥ K3 ♦ 9 ♣ QT9732	**Dlr: N** **Vul: EW**
♠ AJ8 ♥ AJ542 ♦ 642 ♣ 54		♠ 532 ♥ T87 ♦ AKQ8 ♣ AK6
	♠ Q97 ♥ Q96 ♦ JT753 ♣ J8	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT			
N	1						8	
S	1						10	16
E		2	4	1	3		6	
W		3	4	2	4			

With 26 HCPS and a major suit fit, it was no surprise that many pairs were in game. However, (barring a defensive error) the success of Four Hearts depends on how well declarer plays the trump suit.

At first glance, it looks like you have no minor losers and likely two spade losers. So you will need to play the heart suit for only one loser in order to make your contract. What is the correct way to tackle this suit?

If we had the jack, ten, nine and eight we wouldn't need to think for too long – the best line is to finesse once and then return to the East hand and finesse again. This will work 75 percent of the time, losing only when North has both the queen and king of hearts.

However, a little more care is required given we do not have the nine. Imagine we play the seven of hearts to the Jack, losing to North's king on trick one. If we now arrange to be in the East hand and lead the ten, South will cover with the queen and after taking our ace we will need to lose a second heart trick to the nine.

The secret without the nine is to play the *ten* of hearts at trick one, intending to duck this into North's hand. Presuming this loses to the king, we are left with the ace-jack in dummy and can return to East and finesse South's queen on the second trick (thus losing only one trump trick).

It's no better if South covers the ten with the queen. Now we will win that with the ace. Our second trick will be the spectacular play of low from both hands, bringing down the king and letting us sweep up the nine with our remaining jack.

The principle here is that when we have all of the intermediate spot cards we can just consider where the defenders' honour cards are. When they have the ten, nine or even eight we sometimes need to consider a little more deeply. Where could *those* cards be and how can I take advantage of that?